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THE BLACK SHEEP

Sometimes the girl listened to violin music in her room late at night, and her neighbors threatened to have her evicted. She ignored their coughs and the stomping of their shoes, and somehow dominated everyone with her insulting laughter and her immodestly red-painted lips.

The other tenants had often wondered what the girl did for a living. Some said she was from a good family, but disowned by her parents. Others said they had seen her at night on the corner of Los Cerezos Street. The girl pushed past her neighbors on the stairs, said hello, and walked toward her small room, laughing under her breath.

Every time they saw her, she was with a different man. Her first lover worked in the brass-plating factory. He smiled like a starving wolf, but he didn't hesitate to ogle any good-looking girl. When they found out he was having an affair with the seamstress's daughter on the first floor, the neighbors gossiped about the girl's scandalous behavior, and they stopped speaking to her.

Next came a blond man of dubious origin. He kissed her on the stairs in front of everyone, including children, and she didn't hide the fact that he spent the night with her. Sometimes he didn't leave until noon of the next day. After a shameful argument on the staircase between the second and third floors, the immoral blond man never came back. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. The neighbors called another meeting to throw the girl out, but she was the only one who didn't show up. Besides, no one knew how she had managed to have the landlord on her side.

For a while, she seemed to have mended her ways.

Her answers were not as cutting as before. If she had stopped putting lipstick on, she would have been no different from any other girl in the building. Then the neighbors saw her with the third lover. They thought she had married him. Everyone talked about his refined manners and his long hair. It was hard to believe, but maybe he lived somewhere else.

Five months later, the neighbors were still gossiping. Then one afternoon in October, the long-haired boy closed the door, looking disheartened, and never came back. The girl rushed after him, but he had already gone down the stairs. For a moment, they thought she looked hurt and fragile, clinging to the handrail as if it were a life buoy. Then she slammed her door shut, breaking out into the most immodest laugh they'd ever heard.

That night the tenant on the fourth floor thought she heard violin music in her sleep.